

Ghost in the Machine by united states of fail

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Sci-Fi, Suspense

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-25 13:17:13

Updated: 2017-12-24 11:17:07

Packaged: 2019-12-17 03:18:22

Rating: T

Chapters: 7

Words: 2,916

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The adventure was over thirty years ago. Until it came back with a vengeance.

1. Chapter 1: Sleeping Beauty

Steve stared at the computer in front of him, trying to remember what file he'd saved the paperwork he needed in the day before. He tried various files, opening them at random to see if he could locate it that way. No luck. He was on the verge of calling Francine in to show him when he remembered that it was sent in an attachment in an email, and he should be able to open it again the same way.

Technology was just one of the things that he'd had to adjust to in his lifetime, and it refused to ever solidify in his mind in any meaningful way. He missed the days of high school, when things were slower, and though it seemed difficult to believe, easier. Hawkins had retained its outward appearance of a small town, but little things-like laptops and now cell phones had made their way in, like those tunnels out in the pumpkin patches. They'd sneak in slow and insidiously, and before you knew it, the ground you were standing on was as hollow and rotted out as a grave.

He pulled up the email and clicked on the attachment, pulling up the document. It detailed the latest update on the girl's condition, how her sleep, going on twenty-five years now, continued unbroken. He cringed. He'd never had any children of his own, but he had seen Sleeping Beauty, and the thought of Eleven, or Jane, or whatever you wanted to call her, asleep forever, but still awake, mind roaming freely, watching all of them- he couldn't tell if it was cruel, or in all of their best interests to keep her sedated. What she'd done when she was awake-

The door slammed as Pete made his way inside, tracking in snow and profanity. He couldn't get Pete to act like a civilized human being anymore than he could keep Hawkin's PD funded, and as his lieutenant stomped inside, yelling into his phone, Steve felt the kind of impotence most keenly experienced by washed-out high school heroes who wake up one day to find that the adventure does end and the rest of the world doesn't care that you slayed the monster, because how do you even put that on your resume?

Pete hung up the call and took a seat at his desk, propping his feet up like he's at home. Steve can almost hear the ghost of Hopper,

bellowing at whoever the hell this is to unfuck himself. However, Hopper isn't here. It's just Steve, Francine and Pete, and instead of fighting the good fight for the hundredth time, he opted to walk outside. It was shaping up to be one of the worst winters in Hawkins history, and today appeared to be in keeping with the norm. Really, there was no point in being here today. He'd send Pete and Francine home, and then probably head out himself. Make an early day of it. But not yet. For now, he stood in the snow, watching the snow swirl down around him, and imagined himself in a snowglobe- one everyone else he'd ever known had somehow managed to escape, but he hadn't found the way out. Not to say it had been good for everyone, getting out, because not everyone had made it out alive- but at least they hadn't lived to see themselves grow old, fat, saggy and impotent. Maybe he should quit the police. Move to a new town. Try to make a fresh start of it.

But then he doesn't. He turns to head back inside, feeling older than time itself, wanting but desperately fearing change. Anything new would upset the neat equilibrium of his life, and the comfort of boredom.

2. Chapter 2: The Prodigal Son

Joyce couldn't help but look at her boys and try to figure out what had gone so terribly wrong. They were both such smart, sweet boys, both had held so much promise- more than she or Lonnie ever did, that's for sure. But now- she shook her head as she stood behind the counter, waiting for the next customer, or more likely, some kid trying to shoplift like she somehow wasn't going to notice. She'd worked here longer than they'd been alive- she knew what to watch for. What she didn't know anymore was how to protect her family- but then, had she ever?

Everyone had tried to tell her not to beat herself up, that she was a good mom. But she heard the whispers behind her back from the next aisle over in the grocery store, about the Byers boys and how they were both such terrible failures. About how Nancy Wheeler had done the inevitable: woken up one morning, took a look at Jonathan and their little boy, and realized she could have done better. How Will had dropped out of college and returned home only to get hooked on drugs. They didn't know how every night, as he slept in his childhood bed, the nightmares that plagued him at Husson U and driven him home continued to torment him, causing him to wake up screaming and sobbing. They didn't know how Jonathan and Josh were ghosts of themselves, haunting her house like wraiths who never spoke above whispers. They didn't know what it was like to have the promises you fought to guarantee your family ripped away from them, and to have to watch them suffer and die a little every day while you can do nothing but watch.

"I see you."

The kid glared at her before putting the candy bar back on the rack and stomping out of the store. What happened to the Hawkins she thought she knew? It was as if they'd all been living in a snow globe, and someone came along and flipped it over...and things never went back to normal afterward.

She was so focused on her thoughts that she didn't hear Will calling her name. She came back to earth, the motherly part of her wanting to remind him not to call her Joyce, but not bothering. There was so

much wrong with him that the fact he'd completely stopped calling her "mom" ceased to matter entirely.

"Hey...can I get 20 bucks? I promise, I'm not going to blow it on drugs. I got a job interview down at the school and I wanted to get a new shirt."

"A job interview? Really? Honey, that's great! What, do they want you to teach?"

Will sighed. "No, Joyce, they don't want me to teach. They want me to clean toilets and sprinkle sawdust on puke."

She tried to remain optimistic. "Still, that's something, right? You have to start somewhere. Is Jonathan going to drive you? Don't you think you should maybe get a haircut first?"

"Nah, Jonathan's out with Josh. I was just going to walk."

"Are you sure? I can take you maybe after my shift ends-"

"No, it's fine. It's a nice day. I'd rather walk. Thanks though."

She gave him the twenty, plus an extra five for the haircut.

"I'll see you tonight. Call me and let me know how it went, okay? Love you."

"Bye."

And with that, her sweet little boy disappeared again, if he'd ever really come back in the first place.

3. Chapter 3: The Good Samaritan

Steve wound up leaving about an hour later, after sending his folks home. They'd been grateful for the time off; he'd told them to drive safely and then headed home himself. As he made his way carefully through the swirling snow, he caught sight of someone in the alley by the post office. Was that...oh, goddamnit.

Rolling down his window, he shouted. "Byers! What the hell are you doing out here? You know this is supposed to turn into a blizzard, right?"

Will didn't respond though, instead trudging alongside the car and staring straight ahead in that weird, spaced out way he'd had ever since...Steve parked and got out. "Will, hey, come here. Look at me for a second."

"What, goddamnit? What do you want?"

"You're using again, aren't you?"

"Fuck you, Harrington. Why don't you just go on about your business like everyone else in this god forsaken town, huh? Everyone else has gotten on with the rest of their lives. I'm just trying to get on with mine, in my own way. Leave me alone."

"Dude." Steve was pissed now. He'd gotten out of his car, in the freezing snow, to check on this little mini-me version of the guy who'd stolen the last woman he'd cared about, and this little shit wanted to be a complete prick about it. Nope. Not today.

He grabbed Byers hard enough to spin him around and yanked him close enough to see the pores on his cottage cheese colored face. "You listen to me, and you listen good. Enough people sacrificed their time, and in a lot of cases, their lives to save you. I don't know what kind of ptsd you got, but I will not sit here and watch you throw your life away on some stupid drug when I know you're better than that. Come on. Get in the car."

He shoved the much smaller man into the passenger seat and

marched around to the other side. Looks like he was going to have to make a quick stop before he got home to his own house. Somehow, though, it felt right. Probably because it was what Hopper would have done in his cold, wet shoes. Some people were strays, and they needed watching out for, whether they wanted it or not.

He would regret this.

4. Chapter 4: Perchance to Dream

It was all too good to last. She should have known that, but the possibility of something good had blinded her and now, everything was ruined.

Mike was gone.

It was her fault.

She had nightmares all the time- a side effect of being asleep all the time is that there's nowhere to run from your bad dreams. So she relived the worst moments of her life, over and over and over...

She opened her eyes. Next to her, Mike lay sleeping, mouth slightly open as he snored. "Mouthbreather," she whispered affectionately. She knew him better than anyone, but every day, it felt like she learned something new. The first night they'd spent together, she'd woken up halfway through the night to the sound of what she thought was him dying. She'd freaked and grabbed him, shaking him like a rag doll. "Mike! Oh God, Mike!"

He went from asleep to screaming his head off. "Eleven, what the hell? What the fucking hell?"

She didn't wake up so much as she came closer to the surface of reality. In her suspended, in between state, she could still hear everything that went on around her, could still even look in on everyone. From the inky black void, but she preferred not to. No one ever mentioned her by name while she watched them, but they were aware of her presence somehow, if only on the periphery of their consciousness. They were afraid of her now, and having her friends be afraid of her broke her heart. She was, finally, the monster. So instead, she stayed in stasis, listening to the voices around her, and tried her hardest not to dream.

5. Chapter 5: Velocity

Steven and Will pulled up in front of the Byers' house, which certainly looked worse for having been partially demolished and set on fire. At this point, Steve wouldn't have been surprised if the entire building didn't sink into the ground like that scene from *Carrie*. That was another story about a girl with what basically amounted to superpowers, and it ended just as badly as this one. He considered asking the question that had been bothering him since he'd seen Will walking along by himself. At first he thought better of it, then decided to hell with it. "Have you guys heard from Nancy at all?"

Will's silence lasted so long he thought he hadn't heard him, or maybe just offended the shit out of him. But then he answered with a question of his own.

"Do you ever think she was the only one of us who ever stood a chance?"

Steve cut the engine and sat, thinking the question through. "I mean, she was smart, and good, and deserved better than I could give her, but...I mean, after everything she and Jonathan went through, to just up and leave..."

Will fiddled with the hem of his shirt. "But that's what I'm saying. The rest of us, we were damaged. Jonathan included. Nancy was the only one who achieved enough velocity to escape. Lucas and Max, maybe, but they left and who the hell knows what they're doing. I haven't talked to either of them in 10 years. Dustin's still in the army, serving as a idiot meatbag for the government. You don't think he was so much smarter than that, capable of so much more than that? No, he's just out there, looking for more monsters to kill. And Mike, well...and then you've got me. I'm a complete waste of oxygen. It's not just you. Hawkins is poison, and the only cure is to get as far away as you possibly can."

"Well," Steve said after a moment, "that's certainly one way of looking at it. But here's how I choose to look at it: after what happened to Hopper and I tried to step into his shoes, which, believe you me, is a

massive order to fill, I made it my mission in life to make sure no one else ever has to go through the kind of shit we went through. This is my town, and it's my job to keep it safe. It may not be what I wanted for myself in life, but you have to remember that there's honor in protecting what you love. I think Hopper understood that better than anyone, and I try to remind myself of it every day."

He glanced at Will's pale face, and was pleasantly surprised to notice the ghost of a smile there. Will turned to get out of the car and go inside, but Steve stopped him, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Please. I know you've been through hell. But no one who cares about you drug you back so we could sit and watch you kill yourself. Okay?"

Will simply got out and walked inside. Steve sighed and started the car back up, heading back down the driveway. You could lead a horse to water, sure, but short of holding its head underwater and potentially drowning it, that was about all you could do.

He didn't realize he was being watched.

6. Nocturne

I hate all destroy watch

death

cause murder children eat hunger thirst darkness despair

always nevermore

I am nevermore

drown in hopeless blood

die all of you

die

hatred bathed in blood

drown in vomit blood coming

from your eyes

tears

tear out your insides

watch you

think you can

watch as everything burns

watch

devour all watch

your end

Watch as

you

Watch the world

burn

Watch

as your friends die

Watch

7. Chapter 7: The Nightmare Child

Eleven "woke up" screaming. On her trip through what she'd come to think of as the inbetween, for some reason she'd thought it was a good idea to visit the Byers. No one appeared to be home, but she'd ventured inside anyway. Why? What was she possibly hoping to gain? She'd wandered through their home, ghostlike fingers passing through everything she touched. As she neared the back of the house, she heard a small voice. Curious, she made her way to the bedroom at the end of the hall.

A little boy sat at the foot of the bed, apparently talking to himself. At first, she thought it was Will, but wouldn't have he been a grown up by now? She walked up to him, perhaps to identify him, perhaps to better hear what he was murmuring...but as she got closer he looked up at her with eyes made out of teeth. "Hello, Eleven."

That was when the screaming began.

He continued speaking, as she screamed, and she would have stood there for all eternity with the child whose eyes were teeth if the front door hadn't slammed. Will Byers himself walked in, giving the monster child no more than a "hey." The monster child responded, "hey, uncle Will," before looking back at Eleven. "I'll see you in your dreams, Eleven," he hissed as he followed his uncle to his bedroom.

She'd yanked herself back into the inbetween as quickly as possible, still screaming. He didn't know. Will was alone with that thing, and he didn't know. Something was horribly wrong with this child, who wasn't a child at all, and now he was there alone with Will, who didn't seem to realize that anything was wrong at all.

In her halfway awake (halfway happy) she was powerless to do anything. But out of all her friends, Will was the only one left. Lucas was gone, having chosen to forget her. She understood. She couldn't help Dustin now; he'd vanished into shadow. Will was the only one left, and she wasn't going to let him disappear too.

It was time to wake up.